DAMARIS PIMENTEL ULTRA BEAUTY SALON
JAMAICA PLAIN, MA

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INTERVIEWEE:	Damaris Pimentel
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KEY:	CT	Candacy Taylor (Interviewer)
	CB	Carol Burford (Assistant)
	DP	Damaris Pimentel (Interviewee)

CT: We are at Ultra Beauty Salon in Jamaica Plain, which is a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. It is August 17th, Friday, 2012. Carol Burford is present and we are with Damaris Pimentel. Please state your full name and the number of years you've been doing hair.

DP: My name is Damaris Pimentel and I've been doing hair since 1979, which makes it 33 years.

CT: Where are you from?

DP: I'm from the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic.

CT: And where else have you lived?

DP: I lived in New York for a short period of time.

CT: In Manhattan?

DP: The Bronx, that was the first state that I came to, when I came from the Dominican Republic back in 1975.

CT: So how did you get to Boston?

DP: When we first got to New York, I didn't like the atmosphere. Everything was tall, everything was crowded, everything was dirty [laughing], so I wanted to go back home. New York wasn't what I was expecting. But I came to Boston for a weekend. One of my aunts lived in Boston so I made a deal with my father. [I said] "If you want me to stay in

the United States I want to live in Boston. So he agreed with me and that's how we decided to leave New York and move to Boston.

CT: What is the Dominican Republic like?

DP: Well it's a small island that we share with Haiti. It has thirteen million residents. One third is Haiti, two-thirds is Dominican Republic. It's very hot this time of the year, because our summer is real hot. People are friendly. It's a growing population of tourists. Until twenty years ago the island was you know… the habitat the flora, the fauna, everything was small like an island it has like a different flavor but because now it has moved to being more modern, a lot of resorts, big restaurants, big hotels, it's kind of losing the flavor of the island.

CT: So after being in Caribbean culture, it was probably a shock to be in the Bronx.

DP: You bet [laughing].

CT: In the '70s.

DP: Yes in the '70s. I guess now, it would be a little different, but definitely when I came in the '70s, it wasn't for me.

CT: Were you doing hair before you came here?

DP: No, there's a little history on it, when my parents decided to immigrate to United States, I was going to college back home and I already had like two and a half, almost three years of college, but no English, so when I moved to United States I had to find a way to work and because of [not speaking] English, I couldn't go to college right away, I had to go and take a couple of years of English first and that cost money and time and I couldn't… so at the beginning I worked in different places until one day I said I need to do something that gives me freedom to work on my own time, and I always knew I was good with my hands, whatever art, craft, you know.

CT: And what were you studying in college?

DP: An engineer. Civil engineer. So I realized that the beauty industry was only nine months, it wasn't too expensive. Then, it was only $6,000, now it's $17,000 and that would give me the freedom to work with people of different backgrounds, especially Hispanic. So that made me go to beauty school, thinking I could make a career out of it and then later on go to college. Well I went and I finished in ten months and then I started working in this salon in Chestnut Hill.

CT: Where is that?

DP: Chestnut Hill is in Boston.

CT: Did you go to beauty school in Boston?

DP: Yes, right here in Boston.

CT: Where did you go?

DP: The school was Wilfred Academy, in downtown Boston. So I finished like in ten months by April in '80, I finished school. So I went to work in Chestnut Hill with this Italian guy but the environment wasn't as healthy as I thought…

CT: Healthy?

DP: Yeah especially because racial-wise there was a huge difference.

CT: So is Chestnut Hill higher end, mostly Anglo?

DP: Yes, exactly. And I was hired as an assistant, but I really didn't like the environment much…now I know it was discrimination before I didn't understand what was going on. But my father was always a businessman and he said to me "If you're not happy, why don't you open your own salon? It doesn't have to be big. It can be something small where you can work." So I did and in 1982 I opened my first salon.

CT: How did you have the money to do that?

DP: My father lent me the money.

CT: Where was the salon?

DP: 329 Centre St. right here in Jamaica Plain.

CT: And what address are we at?

DP: We are at 401 [Centre St.]

CT: So how was that salon different from this one? This is such a big salon.

DP: Well actually the first salon was a little bigger than this, because it had eight stations and this one only has six. But unfortunately in 1985, there was a huge fire at the building, not at the salon, in the dry cleaner, and it was one of the biggest fires JP [Jamaica Plain] had since I've been here. Of course everything burned down to the ground. So a year later, I opened another salon at 386 Centre St. I've been in the same area for almost forty years [laughing].

CT: So this was in the '80s and I'm sure JP [Jamaica Plain] was very different from what it is now. Was your clientele mostly Dominican or Latino?

DP: When I first opened the salon, yes, it was mostly Spanish, from different backgrounds. You know back then the population in Jamaica Plain was mostly Puerto Rican and Dominican, now it's more diverse you can find people here from all over South Central America, the Caribbean, Spain…so the clientele has changed as JP [Jamaica Plain] has changed.

CT: Can you tell me the difference between Latin hair versus Anglo hair?

DP: Personally, I think hair is hair. What makes the difference is the cultural background, like we from the Caribbean, we have naturally curly hair, and we like to keep the hair natural with the curls, but then other cultures, like Afro-American, they tend to deal with the hair chemically. In the beginning that was different for me, because we love our curly hair, we don't care about wearing our curly hair and we look for ways to make it more manageable, but the relaxer wasn't always the first option, which was different from the Black salon. And if you were to talk to [people in] other cultures like in Europe, people tend to embrace curly hair better than other cultures, except us, the Caribbean's, we don't mind curly hair. So that makes it different, but again, hair is hair for me. I try to base it first, in what the customer wants, second, what their lifestyle is and if that is going to allow their hair to move with them and third, I guess the education that the customer has had on it [their hair] and how to take care of it and if it's anything I can compliment by educating the customer, I do so.

CT: I can imagine the Caribbean can be pretty humid?

DP: Yes.

CT: So you do have people with kinky hair that's actually frizzy?

DP: Yes.

CT: So you're saying they embrace that texture?

DP: Well people that have kinky, kinky hair and they [are] low income, most of them, they braid their hair a lot. But if a person is at a different level of the economy, they tend to relax it a little bit, but where I come from, we [are] like sixty percent mixed, but it's not Black it's like Mulatto, the mix of Indian and Africa, we have a different type of hair so the percentage of people with kinky, kinky hair is not as high.

CT: I lived in San Francisco for years and a friend of mine told me there was a Brazilian man who owned a salon and he had a special hair dryer to deal with that texture because it's not quite as kinky. I don't know what his contraption was but have you ever heard of anything like that?

DP: Of course, of course, the special hair dryer has to do with the way the dryer conducts the heat. If a person has baby fine hair, we need low heat, but if a person has

coarse hair, like we do, it doesn't matter if it's straight or kinky or curly, our hair is very coarse, it's not fine. And of course Brazil is like us, their hair culture is the same, so the hair dryer have to be stronger, the heat conductor have to be stronger and the air have to be stronger so it can dry the hair from inside out and that way it doesn't get frizzy.

CT: So do you have those kinds of hair dryers here?

DP: Today, we only use that kind of hair dryer. We don't have both anymore.

CT: What is it called? Who makes it?

DP: The company usually makes it, they don't have a different name on it. They just call it "Low heat / High heat."

CT: So in your experience what percentage of people want something that's not natural to their style, what percentage want hair that they don't have?

DP: In this industry, most people want what they don't have, unfortunately. Many times, me as a professional, I'll go in and try to find out, "What is it that you're looking for? What makes you want what you don't have?" Ninety percent of the time, I can't provide [that look] if I don't have the material to work with. I usually try to go really deep and look into, "What is it that you're really looking for? Do you think that this is going to change your life?" But it's not. So I try to find out at the beginning because usually once I've been working with a customer for a long time, I can tell right away. [I ask] "What's going on in your life? Why do you want to drastically change from being a brunette to a blonde?" Most of the time that's creating trouble instead of freedom. But in color, I would say seventy percent of people want a different color than what they have.

CT: And what color is that usually?

DP: Always to the lighter side. Most people want their hair a little brighter, a little more gold or a little more red. And I have seen a significant decrease on hair relax. A lot of people they have either kinky or tight curls are learning to deal with their hair more natural than before, and that's in general.

CT: That's interesting. Do you do any Keratin Treatments here?

DP: Yes we do.

CT: Is that the same as the….

DP: Brazilian blowout?

CT: Yeah.

DP: It is the same. But in the market, some people say the Brazilian blowout is when we take a round brush and polish the hair real good, they call it Brazilian blowout, but originally the Brazilian blowout is the treatment that is done to the hair to control humidity [frizziness]. It seals the cuticle of the hair with keratin, which is an element that is natural in your hair when it first comes out of your scalp. So professionally, that is the Brazilian blowout, replacing the keratin that we lose normally and seal it in. [It] usually lasts from eight to twelve weeks, that's the Brazilian blowout.

CT: What do you think of the controversy with the formaldehyde?

DP: I think it's very important that we have [a] conscience about it because any product that has a high level of formaldehyde in the long term is going to harm the hairdresser a lot more than it's going to harm the customer, because the customer is only exposed for a little bit of time, but the hairdresser, if it's done often, yes, there is a high health risk in it.

CT: How often do you do Keratin Treatment here?

DP: I don't do as much, one because I like to think the closer we are to health, the closer we are to beauty, so I don't recommend it a lot, but when a customer comes in and asks for it, yes we apply it. So I don't have a huge clientele. I might do three or four in a month, no more than that.

CT: It's interesting because the industry doesn't regulate this. Over ninety percent of hair salons are independently owned so it's very hard to regulate this in the industry but they are saying that if a salon is doing a lot of them they should have all these ventilation systems. Do you agree with that? Do you think there should be more regulation or no?

DP: I think unfortunately we as a human race need people that regulate us instead of we as individuals to have more conscience that, "this is not good for me and this is not good for the customer so I should not support it." But the business move forward in different directions and if you want to stay in business you need to sometimes bend the rules a little bit even if it's going against your own conscience, because at the end of the day, we have to pay our bills.

CT: Did you see Chris Rock's documentary, *Good Hair*?

DP: No.

CT: Okay. I want to talk a little bit about your customers. What percentage would you say are regulars?

DP: Eighty percent.

CT: What's the longest customer you've been with?

DP: Oh, I have three generations unfortunately or fortunately [laughing]. When I talk about three generations they look at me like *how old are you*? So that's a question mark that pops up right away, but I do have three generations.

CT: That's amazing.

DP: I have customers that I've been doing their hair since '79.

CT: And they've followed you down Centre Street.

DP: Hmm Hmm. They follow me home if I decide to…because we had an accident not too long ago, we wasn't working for almost a month, people was knocking on my door. "I'm not going anywhere else, you need to do my hair in your sink or in the kitchen." I said, "No, no, no, no, no." So we opened a temporary salon to work with our customers while this one was getting ready [to reopen].

CT: I know in the Black community when you lose your hair dresser, it's a crisis. Do you think it's really about what you do to their hair or is it just that you've known them forever? Do you feel like you're kind of a therapist sometimes?

DP: It has a little bit of everything. Once you've been working with a customer and the customer becomes loyal to you, it's a relationship that sometimes you build confidence with the customer. You're reliable and the customer feels like if you don't do their hair, it's not going to come out right. Like in here I have customers and I've been doing their hair a long time and I have co-workers and we've been together twenty years and even if they know we have the same school[ing], the same way we do things, the same shampoo, the same blow dryer, the same rollers, they still feel like you're the one that understands what they're looking for or what they want. If it's an emergency, they will go to the other hairdresser, as soon as you come back they say, "Oh, thank God you're here!" So I guess it's a little bit of everything, as a hairdresser understanding what their needs are. I have learned…I used to be a big talker and now I am not. I'm more a listener than a talker.

CT: Why did you change?

DP: I think that I learned that a customer wants to be heard, they really don't want to hear you. It's a discipline I adopted a long time ago. When I work, I'm usually very quiet, I know in the history of hairdressing, people in general think we talk too much, but it's not [true] in our case.

CT: You started out thinking you were going to be a civil engineer but it seems like you've been very successful as a hairdresser. I'm wondering if you had any doubts? It didn't seem like you were going to do anything else? Did you feel like you had found

your calling? I don't want to put words in your mouth. Was there anything else you wanted to do?

DP: No. No. When I got involved the beauty industry and understanding how difficult it was going to be to go back to college and finishing. The aspect I liked about [being] a civil engineer wasn't the American construction, it was more like the island the Caribbean. That kind of small island build you know. So I kind of lost interest once I became a hairdresser and I owned my own business and I liked the vibe and the freedom of the job because this is 24/7. I like that. And the good thing about it is that I became my own boss very early so I didn't have to answer to nobody, well I had to answer to my customers, but it was different. So that gave me the freedom of raising and supporting my family and I don't think any other industry would have given me that freedom. I worked by appointment. I was there for my kids. I was there for my family. It's been really a joy and I don't want to do nothing else.

CT: We need to hear more stories like that. It seems to be changing, before there was a stigma attached to being a hairdresser, I don't know if you're familiar with the beauty school drop out stereotype?

DP: Hmm mmm.

CT: So I wanted to get more stories about people who are actually thriving and enjoying their work so it's not a negative thing. Do you think there's still an element to that at all?

DP: I think what happened in the beauty industry is that years ago people didn't understand how important the grooming part of the human race is. So people took it for granted. "Ok, I'm going to pay you to do my hair." But people didn't look at the joy of being groomed or the joy of you grooming somebody because I think that's the aspect that some people don't observe. It's a blessing when you find early in your life what you like to do. And once you find out what you like to do and you make a living out of it. It's a double whammy because you're happy with what you're doing and you're making money doing what you like. So the grooming aspect I always knew I liked, so for me it's always been a pleasure taking care of somebody's hair. And I don't even have a problem doing somebody's feet, somebody's hand, somebody's ear…I enjoy it. And on top of that, I'm the older of eight brothers and sisters and back home the culture is that the older [people] take care of the youngers so very early that grooming part of it, I always liked. It wasn't negative for me. I combed my sister's hair, or how my mother bathed the baby that's the good aspect that I always relate to my job a lot. For somebody else it's a sale but for me it's a joy to let you know what else I can do to improve your physical image.

CT: Well it's important. There was this study by a Yale psychologist and she took a computer image of somebody's face and put five different hairstyles on that same face and did this study and asked all these people, how smart is this woman, how wealthy is this woman? All these questions, and based on her hairstyle they had completely

different answers. So hair is so important to how you're perceived in the world and how successful you are. So in my opinion hairstylists are undervalued in terms of what they offer to people and I don't know if that's changing.

DP: I don't know. I don't know because grooming is becoming more low-key. People are more free, they call it now, "bed head." But actually for me, bed head is somebody who is lazy and don't want to comb their hair [laughing]. Of course I'm telling you this, I'm not going to tell my customer who comes in and asks for the haircut. That grooming aspect, I think we're losing elegance, we're losing sophistication and I really don't know yet if that's good or bad because it all depends where you are, where you're going to be and what you are expecting on the first impression. Because for sure, I know, the first impression counts, psychologically, to any person. But I don't know if that culture [trend] is positive or negative because I think we live in difficult times, stressful times, so I don't know if that kind of freedom is good for us, or if we still should put a little more pressure on looking good. That's something I haven't figured out yet.

CT: So I want to talk a little about JP [Jamaica Plain], this neighborhood. Last night we walked about five or six blocks up the street, and saw so many old-school, ethnic salons, that are not as upscale as yours. I'm wondering if they do different hairstyles? You were saying that in the Dominican Republic that lower-income people were doing more braiding, more processing on the hair. Do you think you're all doing similar styles?

DP: I think in any industry there is low, middle and high end. I consider myself middle. I don't know if I should say this but I'm not as snobby and I'm not as careless. I care about my business presentation, I care about the quality of the work that I do. I care about how the salon looks. But when I see other salons that are really, really high end, I say, "I don't want to work in that environment." That's not me. Everything is so tight, you can't breathe.

Now in JP [Jamaica Plain], it's different, because in JP [Jamaica Plain] we have such a diverse community. Here you can find people from all backgrounds, that's why JP [Jamaica Plain] is so interesting. You go from a Black community, to a gay community to a European community, to a Caribbean community…we have people from all over the world, so it's interesting, even to walk the strip, now in the summer, it gives you that sense of diversity and what I like about my salon is that I have very wealthy customers, I mean *very* wealthy and then I have customers that they are barely surviving. So knowing that I have that mix of customers, it pleases me. And the other thing is that we have people from all over the world that comes here, Black, White, Spanish, African…and you can find ten nationalities at one single time in the salon, so that I enjoy, that I like, because I'm in business and I love to be in business because I am a business woman but I'm not in business to make money first. I don't know if that makes any sense.

CT: That makes perfect sense. Because when you love what you do, you're doing it first because you love it first and if you can make money at it, then that is an added bonus.

DP: Exactly.

CT: But it's interesting what you're saying about the people in your salon. For the people who are barely making it…I'm assuming that your services are higher priced than a place that doesn't look as nice as yours, so that person who is financially struggling comes to you because….

DP: I'll tell you what happened. I've been in JP [Jamaica Plain] thirty-three years, in this industry. And I have the people who are my bread and butter and that's where me and my daughter, we are business partners, we don't agree. "Business is business." No, business is not just business, the way I see it. Because you see these people who have been my bread and butter for thirty years and they retire and they're hardly making enough, so I'm not going to charge them $80 for a haircut. If they can afford $35, I'll charge $35, that's what I do. And that allow me to still be in their life and support them and they support me because I still get that $35 in less than an hour, not a lot of people make $35 an hour, so I look at it that way. I know as a hairdresser, because of my knowledge and expertise, I can charge more, but why should I say to a customer that has been with me twenty, twenty-five years, "If you don't pay me $80, I'm not going to do your hair." And then I'm not in the business because I like it, I'm in the business because I want to make money. So that makes the difference.

CT: So does your daughter give you a hard time for doing $35 haircuts?

DP: It's different because she's a hairdresser. She became a hairdresser because she was born and raised into it and she's good. She has a good time but I don't think it's her first, natural talent and of course she was born and raised in the United States so she doesn't have the background that I have and I don't blame her for it. She has that American mentality, "business is business; pleasure is pleasure." So it's different, I understand her point of view, and I respect her point of view, she has this line of clients that knows, hey you're happy, they're happy and then she respects my point of view. Sometimes when she looks at the numbers she goes "oh [sighs.]" But she respects my way too. So that makes it balanced.

CT: That's interesting. So Andrea [her client] was telling me that your father owns a store?

DP: Yes, that's what he used to do back home. He used to own different grocery stores. When you are an immigrant, it depends what drove you to the immigration and in our case, which is unusual because most people that immigrate from my country, they immigrate because they need a higher level of income, but in my father's case, that wasn't the case. It was my brother and I in college and at the time, it was a very bad political situation back home, real bad. So my father, he was scared that he could

lose any of his kids, so you know my mother decided to move to the United States. We weren't wealthy, but we were doing ok back home. So he was able to cash out some of his business and come to the United States with a little bit of money, so that makes it different. He opened a small grocery store back in 1978.

CT: In the Bronx?

DP: No, right here, in Boston. Back then, the Spanish community was just starting to grow in Boston, so he used to go to New York and buy Spanish food and bring it to Boston and sell it from this little store. So it grew. He kept the store until 1998, when he sold it and the people that bought it wanted to keep the name. We never sold the name, we let them keep the name as long as they run the store the same way my father was running it and if that changed, we'd take the name away.

CT: How old is that sign because we walked by it? Was that your father's sign or they made their own?

DP: No that sign had been there a little before my father sold it. I think that sign has been there about fourteen or fifteen years.

CT: So I read an article online discussing the issue of gentrification of JP [Jamaica Plain]. You were quoted and you had a really interesting perspective on that because the assumption is that nobody wants it to change, especially if you've been there a long time. I'd like you to talk a little about your feelings about that.

DP: I never really understood the word *gentrification*. I can't find the true definition of gentrification, but nothing stays the same forever and the city of Boston needs to grow, where are they going to go? The other side of the river, the Charles River? It can't, it's going to keep on growing, so it's a shame that we're losing that resident feeling, that kids can play in the middle of the street, that everything is so nice and quiet. But I think JP [Jamaica Plain] is at the top of the tipping [point]…people from all over, different cultures, different backgrounds and if wealthy people keep moving into the neighborhood and we're not able to mix the low-income with the middle-income with the high-income, I think JP [Jamaica Plain] will lose the flavor. Which most people who have money and move into Jamaica Plain, that's what they like about [Jamaica Plain]. How are we going to keep it the way it is right now? I don't know but what I try to target is non-profit organizations, private sector, the politics, to see if geographically we keep the mix in, that middle-income that low-income, we have to make sure, we *need* to make sure that that stays in and doesn't move out. Now, I think what's making gentrification harder is the college. The college that we have around JP [Jamaica Plain]…a lot of the students come here from all over the world and pay high rent.

CT: What college is it?

DP: Northeastern. Now the hospitals that are around JP [Jamaica Plain], you know doctors and people who are doing their residencies because they are only passing

through, three, four of them live in the same apartment and they can pay $3,000 rent between the four of them. I think that's something we want to look into a little deeper if we want to help gentrification. Because I don't think it's only wealthy people moving in, I think it's people passing by, paying high rent and of course by paying high rent that brings the reality higher at the same time. And we do have a lot of development in JP [Jamaica Plain] that has allowed gentrification to come in and go from a $100,000 house to a half a million-dollar house. It's the same house with no improvement. So it's difficult. There's a question mark there, what can we do to help keep JP [Jamaica Plain] as diverse as it is right now?

CT: Yeah, we went to a restaurant last night for dinner that felt like we were in a different country. Everyone was speaking Spanish and it was a locals place and it was a great experience. And then we got to go to Whole Foods and get hormone-free cream for our coffee [laughing] so to have both experiences is what is really exciting and rich, but I think you're right, the challenge is how do we keep that.

DP: Exactly. That is the challenge. We don't have many neighborhoods to take as an example or a role model because all over America there is this new movement, like it or not, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

CT: I lived in San Francisco for many years and there are neighborhoods that are not recognizable anymore because they were of a certain ethnic culture and now there's nothing left but wealthy White people, the whole city kind of lost its culture and flavor, so many of the artists, so many of the people moved away that made that place so interesting, so you know it's a challenge. I don't know how involved you are in the community. In the article, did it mention that you are on certain committees?

DP: I used to be very involved. I'm not as involved anymore. I'm more like a mentor for the people who are getting involved because I was involved since the beginning. But little by little, you don't realize how much time you put into a community when you volunteer for this and you volunteer for that before you realize it's like a job. So a few years ago I decided that I need to cut down and move toward [doing more] for me than for everybody else, so right now I only work for two organizations, before I was working for five organizations at the same time. Don't ask me how I got there [laughing]. By the time I realized it, [I said], "What's going on with my life?" My husband was complaining, my kids were complaining and I said, "Ok, ok, ok, I'll slow down." So now I only work with only two organizations, one is for the youth, the Hyde Square Task Force, we work with teenagers from low-income, helping them you know finish school, putting them through college, getting them a little job, helping them decide what they want to do as a productive citizen in Boston. Which is was very interesting because somebody used a word the other day that kind of disturbed me a little bit, I have to do some research to find out what people mean when they say, "the kids that fall through the cracks." I don't get it. I don't see how anybody would think that's okay to say that about a kid. I think as a society we have a *huge* responsibility to make sure that that doesn't happen. And the other organization that I work with is an elderly home so I'm going from one extreme to another extreme. I help the Hyde

Square Task Force and now I'm barely new working three years with this elderly home, trying to understand how much society is worrying about where this generation is going to go and how we are going to take care of them and as we go along I'm finding out that we are not in such good shape. Politics talk and say that we take care about our elderly, I think eventually we need to face that we are not really doing [enough]. But I'm usually very much involved and if something comes up that is important for the neighborhood and it requires a little bit of time, sometimes I jump in and work, more behind the scenes than anything else.

CT: That's great. I want to go back to hairstyling for a minute. What do you think about the physical labor of the job? Are there any parts of your body that hurt worse than others?

DP: I'm lucky. Because I'm only five feet tall and I never weigh more than 135 pounds, so from that aspect, I've been lucky, my feet, my legs, my arms, they don't hurt as much. I think the taller the person is, the heavier the person is, the worst that it is. But definitely this is a labor work [job], especially when you get a customer that takes longer to please. And we work by appointment. Usually you take three or four breaks a day, fifteen minutes here, fifteen minutes there. Physically, it should be paid better [laughing].

CT: So how long are you here usually? What's your average day?

DP: My average day is usually eight to ten hours but now I only work four days a week. For now, but when the business demands a little more I have times of the year when I work five days a week and if it's necessary, I work six days a week. But I don't do that all year round. For the holidays I put in more hours, for the summer I cut the hours and try not to work so hard but of course my kids are grown up. When they were growing up I was working seven days a week.

CT: How many kids do you have?

DP: Two, I have a boy Michael Ortiz, he's thirty-six and I have a daughter Brenda Ortiz and she's thirty-four.

CT: Is she here? Is she your partner?

DP: She only does this as a hobby, she has a full-time job, she works for the Boston Police Department and this is like her hobby, she works once in a while, like once a week. But she does the logistics of the business.

CT: Like the bookkeeping?

DP: Hmm mmm.

CT: And what does your son do?

DP: My son is a hairdresser too, but he's in Florida now. He's the one with the talent as a hairdresser.

CT: Where does he work in Florida?

DP: He's real good. He was born to do hair. He's excellent. He's in Coral Springs. "Image" that's the name of the salon he works at right now. He's north of Ft. Lauderdale.

CT: Did he grow up in the salon with you?

DP: Of course.

CT: And when did you realize that he could do hair?

DP: When *he* realized he could do hair. First of all my son realized when he was like seventeen, eighteen, around that age, that he was gay. And of course, at the beginning I asked, "Are you sure? You don't want to check that out? You don't want to go to somebody professional that can help you figure that out?" [He said], "Oh no. I already figured that out Mommy [laughing]. So he was getting ready to go to college and with everything he said, "Mommy, you don't have to be struggling with school." Because he had very bad discipline in school, like reading and applying and concentration, he wasn't good, which was the opposite of my daughter. And he went and worked for a while when he was twenty-one he came to me, he has already lived on his own and everything. He came to me and said, "Mommy, I want to be a hairdresser." I said, "What!" He had never touched a brush or a comb, *nothing* to do with the salon, nothing. The most he could do was answer the phone for me. So it came to me as a surprise, but of course I supported him, I said, "Well go to school for it. When you finish school, we talk about it to see if you can work for me or not." Believe me, the boy has a natural talent. I always knew his people skills were excellent, but he's unbelievable.

CT: Does he have his own salon or does he rent a chair?

DP: The boy loves to move around so he can never own his own salon. He has to work for somebody else. He's an eagle, fly high, be free.

CT: Okay…[Looking at my notes] do any cultural rituals happen in the salon? It might not be the case here but in Black salons there are certain things that only happen in Black salons and I'm wondering if…

DP: For us, specifically, no we don't have any rituals. None of us is superstitious *but* I have customers that are *very* superstitious. I have customers that don't like to be touched from more than one person, it's a bad vibe for them, it's bad energy.

CT: When they're getting their hair done?

DP: When they're getting their hair done. You wash, you comb, you set, you finish. They don't allow an assistant to help you.

CT: What do they think will happen?

DP: They feel it's a pulling of energy. Everybody has a different vibe, right? So being touched by more than one person, is a bad…how do they call it? Like a bad connection, a bad energy, they only go to the people where they feel a good vibe. So they pick a hairdresser and that's it. That's the only person that can touch them.

CT: Is that a cultural thing? Does that happen in the Dominican Republic?

DP: No, no, no, no, no. That's just their thing. And then I have Black customers…you cannot sweep around them. You can't. While they're in your chair, they don't want to see a broom near them. This is something you learn as you go along. Now everybody knows and we have to respect that.

CT: Where does that come from?

DP: I don't know, but mostly Black.

CT: Southern Black?

DP: Hmm mmm.

CB: Yes, because my husband is southern and I can't sweep around his feet at all, a broom does not touch the feet.

CT: Or what?

CB: You have bad luck.

DP: Right. That's another thing you hear people that if the mirror breaks, they scream, "Stay away from me, I don't want to touch those glasses, I don't want to see those glasses!!!" I say, "Oh, come on." But we have to respect the way they think. But we as a salon, we don't have no superstition at all. I get angry when everything is not in the right place, that's my superstition, everything has to be in the right place [laughing].

CT: Well your salon is impeccable. It's very well maintained.

DP: Thanks.

CT: Do you have shampooists? For example If someone comes in your salon will they have two or three people touching their hair?

DP: The business is set up for the hairdresser to work with an assistant. I have a girl at the reception, I have a girl that does the shampoo and then there's the hairdresser. But if any customer walks in and wants to be treated by one person, it's available. But we tend to charge that person a little more. Because it's the hairdresser who has to assist you 100% of the time, so unfortunately you're going to pay a little more.

CT: How much is the average hair cut, is it $80?

DP: No, it goes from $40 to $80, but the average, I would say $60.

CT: And how much for a blowout?

DP: It depends on length and thickness. It starts at $25.

CT: And do you have stand up hairdryers?

DP: Yes.

CT: What's the most old-fashioned hair technique that you do?

DP: Roller set.

CT: And what abut the newest?

DP: The newest? Bedhead.

CT: What does that mean?

DP: Bedhead means that you razor cut the hair, shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo and then when you're done [whistle], you're done.

CT: So you cut it with a razor and you get more…

DP: Yeah, freedom, it moves in different directions.

CT: No structured cut.

DP: Right.

CT: Last question, I'm looking for unusual salons, do you know of any?

DP: Usually, what I find interesting is hairdressers who work in hospitals, hairdressers who work in elderly places, hairdresser that work for shelters.

CT: Homeless shelters? They have hairdressers?

DP: I do know a make-up artist that does funeral homes. That's one I wouldn't want to do again. I did it a couple of times and I will never do it again [laughing].

CT: I didn't know that homeless shelters had hairdressers.

DP: I found that out because I volunteer. We have the "Shattuck Shelter" in JP [Jamaica Plain], they created a program, "Cut your hair, cut your risk," for about ten years. It doesn't exist anymore unfortunately they lost the funds for it. I don't know why it was such little money, they never should have cut it. What they did, every year, the first Monday in December, they would bring volunteer hairdressers to the shelter and anybody could come and get their hair cut. The way it was run was that you would come, take a shower, wash your hair and then the hairdresser would take care of you. It was fun because we did it for like eight years until they cancelled the program. That's when I found out there was another shelter somewhere in east Boston that a hairdresser worked, come to the shelter and for very little money, she will cut the homeless hair.

CT: So it was the homeless shelter that would find the salons to participate and take them to the place?

DP: I don't know how that worked but I know that there are hairdressers that do that.

CT: You know there was a program called "Cut it Out" I don't know if they're still active but they would train stylists on how to look for signs of domestic abuse with their customers and train them on how to get them help them or lead them to services.

DP: Oh, yes, Martha Elliot Health Center did that program a few times. You volunteer for it and you display cards where people can call and you can look for signs. Of course you have to have a nice touch on it, if any customer comes to you, you have the information on how to refer them someplace else. I think the beauty salon is a perfect place for the health system to work against epidemics, work against abuse, domestic violence, work against children's violence. I think salons are like a bridge for that kind of information.

CT: Have you worked in that capacity?

DP: I have collaborated but not necessarily worked in it.

CT: I know for a while they were using salons for this but I don't know if it's common anymore.

DP: On the AIDS epidemic, I think we were a good bridge for…that I did for a long time, like in the '80s, the late '80s I did that. We displayed condoms, we displayed information, we worked very hard on it.

CT: Great, I think that's it. Is there anything you wanted to talk about that I didn't ask you?

DP: Nope.

CT: Well it was a great interview, thank you so much.

[END]